

The Great Shark Hunt

By Andrew Bardin Williams

Based on the novel *Learning to Haight* by Andrew Bardin Williams

eBook Edition

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Adam, his blond mop more windswept than usual, clenched his jaw and pushed forward on the throttle, thrusting the high-powered fishing boat past the Coast Guard station on Bodega Head, into the open ocean. Jack and Nadine were driven back by the g-forces, tumbling in their bench seats at the stern of boat, sinking into the soft foam cushions, holding onto each other for support. Potey, standing next to Adam in the open cockpit unshielded from the spray, widened his stance and strengthened his grip on a metal hold bar fastened to the boat's hull as spray rose from the waves. The water drenched his clothes and hair and rivulets of water streamed down his smiling, chiseled face.

"Weeeeeee!" Nadine screamed in Jack's ear as the boat picked up speed. They skimmed over the swells, sashaying back and forth between the waves to minimize the impact. Nadine, her pigtails flapping in the wind, wrapped her arms around Jack's thin body, holding on tight as the boat bobbed and weaved like a welterweight boxer avoiding a fatal blow. She was beautiful--even while soaking wet--the salty spray giving her face, hair and brow a nice clean sheen. Every three or four seconds, Jack felt their bodies rise up off of the seat. He felt weightless as the boat caught air, his stomach churning slightly--as if with a case of bad gas or nervous excitement.

Adam, wearing bright yellow plastic coveralls to protect himself from the mist, calmly and confidently steered the boat south. They picked up speed as their vessel crossed the channel, its bow pointed at a rocky point rising from the coast. It was obvious to Jack that Adam had done this many times before, spending years piloting the research vessel along the coast, deftly searching for the massive carnivorous fish that lurked under the choppy waves.

"Hey, is that the beginning of Tomales Bay?" Jack yelled over the roaring wind, remembering the map he'd pored over that morning before picking up Nadine and Potey at their apartments in San Francisco. He ran his hand through his wet hair, his once-coifed bedhead hairdo now soaked and matted against his scalp, his pressed shirt now damp.

“Yeah, that’s the opening,” Adam yelled back while pointing to a narrow strip of water just east of the peninsula. “See those rocks right there?” His strong, calloused hand protruded from his plastic sleeve as he pointed to the rocky cliffs directly in front of the boat. “That’s Shark Point. It’s the most northern stretch of Point Reyes.”

Giant waves crashed against the rocks, sending spray fifty feet into the air.

“Do you ever go surfing out he-ah?” Potey asked in his thick Boston accent as he watched a perfect set curl toward the point. He tightened his grip once more, his knuckles slowly turning white.

Adam chuckled. “No dice, man. The waves look good, but they call it Shark Point for a reason. You’d have to be crazy to even think about getting on a board out here. Besides, where do you think we’re going?” He turned the wheel, pointing the boat toward a spot less than a hundred yards from the rocks.

“Seriously?” Jack asked, still yelling to be heard over the engine. “We’re looking for sharks this close to land?”

“Yep.” Adam nodded his head. “They hang where there’s food, and that’s right here, just off the shallows.”

The boat continued to swerve between waves as Jack wondered how he’d found himself on a research vessel off the Northern California coast at six in the morning, tired, hung-over, surrounded by two old friends and a woman he’d just met but was already head over heels in love with.

He’d known Adam and Potey since they were undergrads at Boston University. Potey had been his roommate during their freshman year, and Adam, a year older, was their gregarious resident advisor. All three had made their way west in the few years since graduation, reconnecting in the real world as far from Kenmore Square as possible.

After years of toiling away in a downtown Boston advertising agency with little to show for it, Jack was a recent San Franciscan, having quit his job, dumped his live-in girlfriend and left his hometown to start a new life in California--a necessary change during a restless quarter-life crisis.

Fortunately, he had a built-in support system on the ground, crashing with Potey until he figured things out. Potey had moved out west years before and worked himself up to vice president for a high-tech public relations firm and was living the life of a twenty-first century playboy, texting late night booty calls from his iPhone and twittering about his late-night trysts in 140-character updates: *nailin the intern tonight; got her panties down around her ankles; think she’s up for a dirty sanchez?*

Jack didn’t have his friend’s inexhaustible thirst for snatch but marveled at Potey’s cold-blooded efficiency as he hit up and subsequently got blacklisted from bars throughout the city’s distinct neighborhoods. Starting with Polk Gulch and moving west, Potey had devoured unsuspecting women in the Marina, the Fillmore, Western Addition, and eventually the Richmond and Sunset. Jack just wished he didn’t have to experience them from the other side of the paper-thin walls in Potey’s downtown penthouse apartment.

Despite his more respectful view of women, Jack didn’t hold the sexcapades against Potey who was actually a good, loyal friend, someone who’d step in and fight a larger adversary if he was giving a friend trouble.

Adam, on the other hand, was somehow getting himself in crazy, unpredictable situations and always lived to tell about it. He was the perpetual student--a thirty year old that had never held a real job who was getting his PhD from UC-Berkeley. Because it sounded cool and helped him pick up chicks, he was studying the migratory habits of great white sharks, tagging a population off Bodega Bay and tracking their movements through the feeding, breeding and birthing seasons. Jack and Potey had run into him at a bar late one night. He was alone, three vodka tonics in, non-prescription Buddy Holly glasses across the bridge of his nose, trying desperately to hit on everyone's dates as they came up to the bar to order a drink. Immediately recognizing Jack and Potey, he offered to take them on his next field research trip, telling them it would be a gas.

The boat neared the point and Adam cut the engine, drifting the last twenty yards toward his target. The boat began to bob up and down as the waves continued to roll past, first sending the starboard side up in the air, then forcing it to come crashing down as the port side gained several feet of altitude. Jack, Nadine and Potey, still getting their sea legs under them, rolled with the waves, first grabbing one side of the boat, then the other. Adam was the only one used to the motion of the ocean. He deftly stripped off his plastic rain gear and proceeded to walk about the deck, unloading his equipment. He was in sharp contrast to the boorish resident advisor Jack remembered from Boston. Ten years ago he'd been immature, uncertain, horny, a joke to the students on his floor. But now, ten years later out on his boat in the open water, the researcher was calm, collected, confident even.

Nadine held out a hand as the boat rolled, bracing herself with her knuckles pressed next to her butt, her shoulders rigid, her body tense, only her neck on a swivel as the boat continued to rock. One of her pigtails tickled Jack's neck as they rose into the air, the sensation taking him back several weeks, to the moment they had met. Jack had been on his way back from a tough job interview when he saw her through the big picture window in front of a laundromat in Potey's neighborhood. She had been sitting on a counter, waiting for her clothes to dry, her knees bent up toward her chin, reading a worn, dog-eared copy of *The Dharma Bums*. She had looked up from the book as Jack passed by, their eyes meeting for an instant through the window. She had smiled, showing a set of beautiful white teeth and rich, luscious lips, her shoulder-length hair pulled back in two pigtails that stuck out the back of her head at a forty-five degree angle. The combination of her unique beauty and the fact that she actually smiled in Jack's direction took him by surprise.

Instinctively, he froze on the sidewalk as every failed pick-up line from Jack's entire geeky life flashed through his head. He hesitated for a moment, and then he did what he always did, he turned tail and continued up the hill to Potey's condo. Up the stairs, he flung open the front door and tossed his notebook on the coffee table. It bounced, slid off the far end, and dropped to the floor on top of a worn, soiled athletic sock. He bent down to pick up the notebook and instead came up with the sock. Sprinting into the bedroom, he grabbed his laundry bag, and, stuffing the sock inside, rushed out the door.

The woman looked up from her book as Jack walked through the entryway, recognition crossing her face as she glanced down at the half-empty laundry bag in his hands, knowing instantly the motives that had brought him back. She laughed a knowing laugh, motioning Jack over, butterflies making him clutch his stomach to make

sure it was still there. The washer hit the spin cycle as he got the nerve to start a conversation. The woman looked relieved when he finally opened his mouth, giving him some much needed confidence.

"Hi," he said. "I'm Jack."

"I'm Nadine." She marked the page she'd been reading and set the paperback down on an empty washing machine. "I was wondering when you were going to get the nerve to ask me out," she said. Her voice was deliberate but coy, playful even, like she had an agenda and wasn't shy about broadcasting her intentions.

"Did I--uh--ask you out?" Jack wondered suddenly if he had blacked out and suffered short term memory loss.

"No, but you're about to," she said, patting the counter next to her.

Jack smiled at the memory, shaking his head in wonderment and peered over the railing, marveling at the size of the waves crashing about the surf. About a hundred yards further, on the other side of the channel, a nice sandy beach lay at the mouth of a valley cutting its way through the coastal mountain range. The sun was twenty degrees over the horizon, casting long shadows onto a small town, where it was probably quietly, slowly waking the residents.

"That's Dillon Beach," Adam said, motioning over his shoulder as he pried open a waterproof box he hauled out from a storage compartment in the stern. Jack squinted into the sun, making out a collection of low, two and three story buildings, a small parking lot, picnic tables and several garbage cans strewn about.

"People swim there?" Potey asked.

"Yeah, surf's not too great across the channel, but I see people in the water all the time just fooling around."

"And we're looking for sharks? Right here?" Nadine asked, incredulous. She pointed to the rolling waves rocking the boat. Adam smiled, pulling a clipboard from the opened box.

"I should've given you these before we left the slip. The squares upstairs make all the research volunteers fill these out."

"What are they?" Potey asked. His hands were covered in sunscreen that he was applying to his face, ears and neck.

"Liability waivers. So you can't sue the school if you get eaten by a shark."

Nadine snorted. "Ha. That's awesome. Where do I sign?"

Adam winked as he passed her the clipboard and pointed to a line. "Thanks for helping me out with my research, by the way." He spoke softly, almost sing-song like, and a grin spread across his face. "When I invited these two idiots I didn't expect them to bring such a lovely assistant."

Nadine smiled back and handed the form to Jack who gave Adam a disapproving look, his right eyebrow arched, his mouth crooked. Memories of Adam hitting on the study dates Jack brought back to his dorm room danced through his head as he read and signed the form.

"Bro, sign for me, will ya?" Potey asked, holding up gooped-up hands. Jack sighed, marking a giant "X" under his name. He passed the clipboard back to Adam who tossed it back in the box.

“Ok. Who wants to do what?” he asked. “Once we spot a shark, it’s all hands on deck. So listen up now, because once shit starts, we’ll need to act fast. Things go pretty quick.”

“I’ll be the shark wrangler,” Potey volunteered. “I’ll jump in with a knife between my teeth and hold it down while you shoot a harpoon in its back.”

“Potey is on chum duty,” Adam said, smirking. “It matches your personality, no?” Jack and Nadine laughed nervously, eyeing the equipment that Adam had laid out on the deck in front of them. Jack glanced down at a six-foot long harpoon lying along the port-side railing, the sharp barb attached to the homing beacon looking like it would piss off anything into which it was hurled. It lay next to a heavy iron and glass-encased underwater camera lashed to the end of a wooden pole with “PLAY” clearly printed in red ink on a large button on the side. Jack wiped his brow with his free hand, the other still clutching the railing, enabling him to keep his balance against the constant rocking motion. His stomach gurgled, releasing a bit of gas.

“Nadine, you look artsy. I’m going to need you to be my photographer,” Adam said as he took out a second camera, this one an expensive-looking SLR, and passed it to Nadine. “In addition to tagging the sharks, we’ll need to be able to identify them so we know who we’re tracking. Plus, if the Discovery Channel ever returns my call--” He pulled a rubber mat out of the storage compartment, laying it out on the bench in front of the cockpit.

“Here. Stand on this, should be steady enough. Make sure you have the height to get the full shot of the shark in the view finder. I usually have it zoomed all the way out.”

Nadine pulled the camera strap around her neck and hoisted herself up on the bench. Adam leaned forward as she climbed up, not bothering to hide the fact that he was checking out her round, firm ass. Nadine ignored him and leaned forward with the front of her body, from her shins to her chest, pressed against the cockpit, giving herself additional balance and support. She fingered the power button and squinted through the lens.

“How big are these monsters, anyhow?” she asked. Jack was curious as well.

“Oh, about eighteen, twenty footers,” Adam answered matter-of-factly. Jack arched his eyebrows while Potey whistled. Nadine looked up from the camera.

“Wait. How big is this boat?” she asked.

“Oh, about eighteen, twenty feet.”

“Nice.” Nadine smiled nervously and continued to fiddle with the settings on the camera. Adam turned to Jack who was still clutching the side of the boat.

“Jackie, baby. I need you to do something very important.” Jack leaned forward, keeping one hand on the railing. “You’re my decoy.” Adam smiled.

Nadine snorted for the second time, raising her face to the sky with her eyes closed, still gripping the camera.

“Yeah, right,” Jack said, shaking his head. “Who do you think you’re kidding?”

“No, seriously,” Adam countered. “I really need you to be the decoy.” He turned around and hauled a dry bag out of the storage compartment, pulling out a black carpet rolled up into a ball. “I want you all to meet Sidekick. He’s the fifth member of our crew.”

The carpet unraveled at Adam’s feet, transforming into the silhouette of a four-foot-long harbor seal, flotation devices tied throughout its body. Adam fastened a line from its head to a fishing pole and handed the tackle to Jack.

“You a fisherman, Jackie?”

Jack shrugged. He’d gone out with his Boy Scout troop when he was a kid, but hadn’t touched bait since then.

“Throw him over.”

Jack picked up the dark carpet, inspecting it as he prepared to toss it overboard. It was covered in gnash marks, long tears running the length of the ragged body, stray threads hanging off in all directions. Sidekick had definitely seen better days. Jack shook his head in disbelief and tossed the carpet over the side of the boat, watching it float out behind them as he released some slack from the line.

“Let’s get him out about fifty feet behind us,” Adam said as he continued to rummage through the storage container. “We need to get some distance between us and the pissed off shark who just realized he has a mouth full of carpet.”

“Awesome,” Nadine squealed as she snapped a photo of Sidekick drifting behind the boat in the churning water.

Jack lay prostrate on the side of the boat, leg hanging over the bench, his head tilted back, eyes closed, face warmed by the summer sun. Beads of sweat had formed on his forehead despite the cool off-shore breeze, and they were starting to pool, streaming down the side of his face, tickling the moist, salty skin around his temples. He could feel his eyebrows and sideburns collect the moisture, shielding his eyes and ears from getting wet.

They’d been on the boat for more than an hour, drifting on the ocean, rocking back and forth in the waves, Sidekick faithfully floating along behind them. Waiting. Twice, Adam had started up the engine and repositioned the boat, pointing the bow toward the rocky coastline, allowing them to float over the same patch of water, an area that he claimed was full of things sharks liked to eat. Prime hunting ground.

Jack glanced at Potey, who was stretched out on his back on the other side of the boat, his eyes closed, clutching the ice pick Adam had given him to handle the chunk of baby seal meat that they were using to spread an oil slick across the surface of the ocean. Adam claimed the university had gotten the meat from a local who had found the already-dead seal washed up on shore and didn’t want it to go to waste.

Adam and Nadine were attentive, scanning the water around Sidekick for boils, a sign that something large was lurking just beneath the surface. Jack had been listening to them make small talk for more than an hour, chatting about the weather, the nightlife in San Francisco and their favorite TV shows. There was a break in their conversation, and Adam must’ve noticed Jack stirring.

“Sorry we’re not getting much action today, Jackie,” he said softly, maintaining his gaze over the horizon. “Sometimes we get skunked.”

“Just waiting for these damn sharks to appear,” Jack responded, relieved to be invited into the conversation. He stood up, placed the fishing tackle in a metal base attached to the side of the boat and stretched his arms over his head. He caught Nadine’s eye as he attempted a few deep knee bends on the rocking boat, failing, falling on his butt on the second try. Jack saw her struggle not to laugh, covering her mouth with her hand. She smiled, winking under her stocking cap.

Adam broke the silence.

“You guys see the Sox game yesterday? Reminded me of the '99 playoff game we snuck into at Fenway.” Jack and Potey nodded as Adam continued. “Jackie, you were so scared an usher was going to catch us, you just stood there at the hole in the fence for a full two minutes while Potey and I yelled at you to climb through.”

Jack stopped in mid-crouch, staring up at Adam in the captain's chair, the sun behind his body casting a long shadow across the boat. His heart fluttered nervously as he shifted his focus toward Nadine, who stood silently, smiling, scanning the horizon, the camera at her chest.

“We finally had to physically push you through,” Adam continued. “It was like you were frozen or something.”

“Great game though,” Potey chimed in, quickly changing the subject. He gave Jack a weak smile. “Pedro versus the Rocket. Doesn't get any better than that.”

“Yeah, after the game we were on such a high,” Adam said, taking his gaze off the water. “We went to Boston Beerworks and started hitting on the waitresses. That was the only time I ever saw Jackie go up and talk to a girl. It was fantastic.”

Jack continued to stare up at his former resident advisor, the guy who was supposed to offer guidance and support, but who instead was obviously doing everything he could to undermine him in front of Nadine. Jack remembered the game and the bar vividly; it was one of the only times he'd been able to put himself out there, ignoring the voice inside his head that had always urged him to stay in the background, never take a chance, always remain anonymous. However, high from the dramatic Red Sox victory, he'd confidently asked the waitress for her number, and she had eagerly complied.

Adam continued, “What was her name, Sara or something? Didn't you end up dating her for what, like, five years? What happened to her?”

Jack's mouth dropped open, and he gaped at Adam who was standing next to and in front of Nadine. Jack could see her face over his shoulder, eyes wide open, ears tuned in, anticipating his answer. Adam continued to look down at Jack from the cockpit, waiting expectantly for an answer as well.

“Damn it, Adam,” Jack exclaimed. “You're always doing that.”

“What?” Adam shrugged, a smile on his face, doing a bad job of feigning innocence.

“You know what you're doing. You're hitting on Nadine. It's not the first time you've gone after a woman I'm interested in.”

Adam continued to grin, looking extremely condescending to Jack.

“It's true.” Potey spoke up from his seat in the stern of the boat, looking up at Adam with a serious look. “You've always undermined Jack around the females.” He motioned at Nadine who stood silently above them on the bench, gazing out over the horizon.

“Hey, I'm a scientist,” Adam defended himself. “I believe in Darwinism. I'm just taking advantage of the weakest in the herd.”

“Fuck you,” Jack said, his teeth clinched, his eyes afire. “You're just insecure.”

“Hey, Adam, cool it.” Potey carefully took a step forward, balancing himself on the rocking boat while getting ready to break up his friends if things got physical. “We all know what you're doing, and it's not--.”

“Shark!” Nadine yelled suddenly, pointing to a spot behind the boat. Jack turned his head in time to see a grey mass crash back into the water, its mouth agape, Sidekick wedged between its powerful jaws.

“Holy shit--“ he exclaimed as Nadine miraculously got several shots off with the camera she held at chest level.

“Keep taking pictures,” Adam yelled as he scrambled out of the captain’s chair and picked up the underwater camera and the hand-held harpoon.

“We only have one chance at this,” Adam said as he scanned the water, waiting for the shark to resurface. “Jack, start reeling in that slack.”

Jack grabbed the fishing pole, furiously reeling in the line, scanning the water for another sign of the beast. Sidekick popped up ten yards off the starboard side, bobbing up and down in suddenly calm water.

“There he is,” Nadine said as a giant shadow moved under the boat, its gray skin offering a sharp contrast to the clear, emerald water. Adam thrust the underwater camera under the waves, pointed directly at the approaching shark, and lifted the harpoon over his head with his other hand, waiting for the beast to get closer. Jack looked at Potey who was leaning over the side of the boat furiously hacking at the seal meat with his ice pick, a shiny oil slick trailing several feet to the side and behind them.

“It’s coming around again,” Adam said, pulling the camera out of the water and crossing over to the left side of the boat, tracking the large mass as it approached.

“Jackie, reel him in slower. He’s confused right now. He’s investigating us.”

The dark mass kept moving closer, slowly following Sidekick as Jack pulled the decoy through the oil slick. A grey snout surfaced out of the water, nudging Sidekick’s fake tail, pushing him to within several feet of the boat. The nose disappeared and the dark figure took a hard right, drawing a course parallel to their starboard side. Adam lunged across the deck, wedging himself between Jack and Potey, furiously stabbing at the water with the harpoon.

“Damn it,” he yelled as he pressed against Jack trying to get closer, pushing him against the side of the boat, doubling Jack over the railing at the waist with his arms pinned at his side. Jack clutched the fishing pole as Adam pressed up against him, straining to achieve more reach and forcing Jack closer to the water. His face hovered close to the surface as the dark mass started to swim by, the spray from the waves crashing up against the boat wetting his brow. The water turned dark underneath him as the beast swam several feet under the surface, the beautiful emerald water Jack had admired earlier blocked out by three thousand pounds of muscle and teeth. Adam smashed Jack against the railing, thrashing at the water with the harpoon, trying to get the depth necessary to attach the beacon at the base of the shark’s dorsal fin.

“Ahhhh, too close, too close,” Jack yelled as Adam pushed him down ever further.

“I. Can’t. Reach,” Adam yelled in Jack’s ear, straining with all his might to climb over Jack and get closer to the passing shark.

Jack could feel the air escape his lungs, the blood rushing up to his face. He stared down into the dark water with its boils rising up to the surface, clearly able to make out the shark’s head, fins and tail. He released his grip on the fishing pole, letting it crash to the deck, and put both hands on the railing in front of him. He jerked his elbow back, catching Adam in the ribs. Adam cried out and eased off, allowing Jack to position his hands in front of him, palms flat against the side of the boat. Jack pushed with all this strength, doing a standing pushup with Adam’s weight more than doubling gravity. Adam frantically yelled in his ear to be still, but Jack continued to rise up, sending his adversary crashing to the deck behind him. Adam landed with a thud on the fiberglass

deck directly on top of the underwater camera, still dripping from its dip in the ocean several seconds before. The harpoon landed at Jack's feet, the handle hitting his sneaker, the barb and beacon falling harmlessly against the railing on the other side of the boat. Without thinking, Jack gave Adam a quick kick in his side and grabbed the harpoon. Turning, he leaned back over the side, scanning the passing dark mass for any sign of anatomy.

"Right behind the dorsal fin!" he heard Adam yell behind him on the deck as Jack raised the harpoon above his head. He jammed it into the water. The harpoon hit what felt like a brick wall just under the surface, jarring the wooden handle out of his hand as the gray mass retreated out of arm's length and Jack collapsed next to Adam. Potey reached down from his seat in the stern, plucking the harpoon from the water as it popped back up to the surface. Adam scrambled over Jack and grabbed the pole from Potey. He lifted up the tip, revealing that the barb and electronic beacon were missing.

"Ha!" he yelled, seemingly forgetting that Jack had just thrown him to the deck and kicking him in the ribs. He rushed to an open laptop in the cockpit. He pressed a few buttons as Jack and Potey crowded behind, watching him call up a window that looked like the radar you'd see in a submarine. There was a flashing yellow dot just off center in the top-right quadrant moving away from the boat.

"You did it!" Adam yelled at Jack, cupping Jack's head in his hands, screaming into his face. Potey slapped him on the back. Nadine let out a rebel yell from her perch on top of the bench.

Jack smiled from his seat on the deck, wiping the salt spray from around his eyes. "Yeah, I guess I did," he said, his hands beginning to shake from the adrenaline. "I saw my chance and took it. It feels great."

Several hours later, Jack, Nadine and Potey were in the car, heading back to San Francisco, back-tracking over the country roads they had traveled that morning, this time the sun at their backs. They chattered constantly about their adventure on the water with the size and shape of the shark and Jack's heroics exaggerated each time.

As Bob Marley echoed throughout the cabin, Nadine suggested they take the "scenic" route back into the city, and Jack turned down Highway 1 that ran along the coast. They came to a sign for Dillon Beach, the town across the channel from Shark Point. Jack pointed the car west once again with eager approval from his passengers.

They came flying down out of the hills toward the coastline, approaching the small beach town from above. They cruised past a short row of stores where the road dead-ended into a parking lot, the beach lying just ahead. The three tumbled out of the car and sprinted for the surf, Potey kicking sand in Jack's direction as he ran past. Jack grabbed Nadine's sweatshirt that still smelled like the sea, giving her a playful push. She yelped as she stumbled, catching herself before returning a shove.

The pair detoured left, approaching the rocky cliffs that protected the cove. A pile of boulders lay at the base, forming pools of water brimming with life. Jack scrambled to the top of one of the huge rocks, turning around to help Nadine. They stood next to each other, gazing out across the water, Potey below them.

"Po-teeeeeee!" Nadine shouted, her hands cupped around her mouth. "Po-teeeeeee!"

Potey looked up, shielding his eyes from the bright sun behind them before pointing up in recognition. He continued toward the waterline, giving them some much-needed privacy. Jack stretched out his arms and took a seat on the rock while Nadine did the same. They stared out toward the open ocean, side by side, just sitting in silence, taking in the beautiful scenery. Absentmindedly, Jack scanned the water around Shark Point in front of him, watching for boils rising up to the surface.

“So. Who’s this Sara girl that Adam mentioned?” Nadine asked.

Jack smiled. She wasn’t afraid to get right to the point and put him on the spot.

“Just a girl,” he teased, nudging her with his shoulder. He smiled nervously as his hand instinctively went up to his face to cover his mouth.

“Oh, yeah? She seems like more than just a girl.”

“No really, she’s a girl I dated in Boston before I came here.”

Jack put his arm around Nadine and squeezed, hoping she’d be satisfied with the short answer. They sat in silence for a few seconds, watching Potey explore the sands below them. He picked up a shell, whirling it into the outgoing tide. It skipped across the calm surface before it cut sideways into an incoming wave and was swallowed up by the surf. The silence continued, but Jack knew that Nadine wasn’t satisfied with his answer about Sara. The voice inside his head said to keep quiet, she’d get over it, there was no need to dig up past demons. Things were going well between the two of them, and an ex-girlfriend could only complicate things. He opened his mouth to speak but didn’t know what would come out. He tried again, this time, forcing the words to bubble up out of his throat and into the cool sea air.

“Ok, well, she was more than just a girl,” he reluctantly said.

“I’d say so,” Nadine responded. “I mean, five years. That sounds pretty serious.”

Jack shifted his butt on the rock. Something was making him uncomfortable: a pebble, a piece of quartz, the conversation. He stopped squirming and decided to ignore the apprehension.

“Well, it was seven years actually, so, yeah, I guess it was serious. We were together a long time linearly.”

Nadine turned her head. “What do you mean linearly? That’s not even a word.”

Jack laughed. He couldn’t believe he was telling her this. “I mean that, yeah, we were together for a long time. But honestly, it feels like a few weeks. That’s about how much I feel I know her, and that’s how much I feel she knows me. We never talked. We never shared. I mean, we never went shark hunting.”

Nadine nodded. Slowly.

Jack took a deep breath, preparing to jump in head first. “And, I don’t want it to be like that with you.” He paused, gazing out at the waves softly coming in, crashing against the beach. Jack shrugged his shoulders, suddenly feeling small, vulnerable, like a young child trying to explain why he liked candy to a group of grownups. “I really want to get to know you, to understand where you’re coming from. Where you want to go. What you want from me. How I can be a good boyfriend. A good lover.”

“Lover?” Nadine stifled a laugh.

“You know what I mean.” Jack sheepishly swung his legs against the rock.

“I do.” Nadine’s face was serious. “I want that sort of thing too.” She nodded again as she spoke, continuing long after the last word. The bobbing motion was contagious and Jack started nodding as well. Jack grew more confident as their heads moved up

and down in perfect unison. Then they both laughed, not looking at each other, but at the endless ocean in front of them, knowing that this was the start of something great.

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Thank you for reading my short story. *The Great Shark Hunt* was adapted from a chapter in my novel *Learning to Haight* which is available now at major e-retailers. If you liked this story, you'll like my book.

About the Author:

Andrew Bardin Williams is a freelance author and copywriter living in San Francisco. Discover his other works at LearningtoHaight.com and [Facebook.com/LearningtoHaight](https://www.facebook.com/LearningtoHaight).